VHGA NEWS!

The Vermont Hang Gliding Association Quarterly Newsletter
Spring 2003

Greetings from the Pres.

By John Arrison, VHGA president

Spring is finally here. For those of you who had the opportunity to fly this winter your skill levels are probably much sharper than those of us who did not. Reguardless, It is always a good idea to visit the training hill and fine tune those take off and landing skills before hitting the mountain.

I was surprised and pleased at the attendance at the April meeting. The weather was awful but 18 people showed up, many driving quite a ways.

This winter the local snowmobile club used my land for a trail. The club staked out the trail and posted a speed limit at my request. Most users obey the postings but a few did not and drove wherever they pleased. I could refuse the club the use of my land next year, sighting the bad behavior of those few as the reason why, and they would loose a scenic 15-mile trail. The moral of the story is we as free fliers use other people's land for both take off and landings all the time. It is your responsibility to know and obey the rules of any site. Use your head when landing and breaking down, don't block roads, don't linger, don't use foul language, and don't drink alcohol. Every year the club has to deal with one problem or another with local landowners.

Don't forget how rowdy the spring air can be and have a safe flying season.

Florida invaded by New England Horde!

By Rodger Furey

It has become a tradition for a large number of New England pilots to migrate south during the first few months of the year when Ascutney is encased in snow and no sign of an early thaw. This year was no exception. Wills Wings Demo Days at Wallaby Ranch saw as many as fifteen to twenty pilots from the northern reaches. There was a Camp Rob south, though less mischief and mayhem than one would have expected with such a sizable collection of reprobates. The following are some of the stories from the New England participants.

Ken Rosenberger: The most memorable flight during the week for me was definitely the last day. A whole group of us, at least seven VHGA pilots, convened at cloudbase and did some team flying. Most of us had radios that were actually working that day, so we agreed to go cross-wind up Rt. 27 and see what developed from there, which for the most part turned into an XC to Quest. Hours later, high over Quest with cumi's still plentiful we decided to return to Wallaby. All except Aric, who got low (Mr. Knuckle-dragger at it again) and landed at Quest. The rest of use decked it short of Wallaby. We probably only averaged a ground speed of about five miles an hour, but it was one of the best team flying days I've ever had.

Peter Kelley: I was two glides behind Tom right from the start at Wallaby. We had planned to pass to the north of Zephyr Hills, then head NW towards the coast. Despite a report by Tom that he was working an *old* cloud, I homed in on him only to deck it at the Centennial Middle School. I chose the school to give the kids at the playground a thrill and because I hoped the attention might get me some food, water, and maybe a ride. After I landed, all the kids were shouting "Fly again, mister!" to which I forced a smile while muttering curses. After all, Tom was still in the air and I was *not!* Shortly thereafter a sheriff appeared with a frowning entourage, the principal of the middle school, and asked me my buisness there. Friendly banter soon ensued, a camera appeared and Peter's excellent adventure was recorded, handcuffs and all!

POP QUIZ !

This is a picture of:
A. Peter Kelly holding hands with a new-found best friend.
B. Peter Kelly getting cuffed by one of the local finest after being mistaken for an airborn Osama bin Laden during an ill-advised landing at a public middle school in Florida.

Greg Hanlon: During an out and return from Wallaby to Quest I was forced to land about half way between the two parks. I chose a huge field close to a dirt road but I soon realized I was going to have a significant walk because the road was gated. After walking my glider out most of the way I spotted Tom's vehicle and a couple of other trucks parked at the end of the dirt road. Tom contacted me on the radio and indicated that there was some trouble brewin' with three unhappy locals. Knowing Tom is a seasoned XC pilot with landowner experience and an ex-farm boy I figured he could talk about corn, sheep (if you know what I mean) or do whatever was needed to smooth things out at his end. Just then another good-ol-boy came ripping across the field in a pickup truck, 'Dukes of Hazard' style, and the yelling started at my end. After a long apology, an offer to buy beer and a lot of talk about cows, acreage, guns and how easy it would be for someone to disappear in a gator hole back there, my Duke boy finally calmed down.

FLORIDA page 4

THE VHGA XC EXTRAVAGANZA A SUCCESS!

(DESPITE THE FRIGGIN' WEATHER)

By Rob Jacobs

The wind and cold and rain and snow and sleet and dark of night failed to keep us hungry, lonely and determined pilots from attending the VHGA XC dinner and pre-dinner party this year, though you've got to give the elements credit for effort!

I was the lucky guy who got to arrange the dinner this year. I guess the powers-that-be just thought Sandy and I would be the logical choice considering all the Camp Rob parties we throw. This was a bit different though, other people's money was involved. So we picked the most expensive buffet we could find, from a place that everyone was familiar with and ran with it!

Before the dinner, Sandy and I had had a sort of cocktail hour at our place so the people with a long drive could relax, have some munchies, and mingle prior to the main event. This year, we did mini kabobs wrapped in pita bread - they were really tasty, so much so that nobody really chowed at the restaurant! There were about thirty-five people at our house for a few hours before we all heading out, and man, what a scene *that* was. You see, our driveway can normally accommodate plenty of cars, and there is usually more than enough room to maneuver. This year, we had about nineteen feet of snow out front, with snow banks piled higher than I've ever seen. The last person to arrive had to leave first and the coordination required to accomplish this task was a bit more daunting than you might expect. Eventually, after about 45 minutes, everyone managed to get out and make their way to the restaurant, which had been bought by a steakhouse and renamed T. R. Brennans (it was Angelos Restaurant last year), a vast improvement! We had stuffed chicken, awesome roast beef, and some kind of fish which I avoided but everyone else raved about. The service and food was excellent. John Arrison, our fearless leader, took the floor to hand out the XC awards for 2002. As most of you are aware, the big upset was Kurt Warren, who breezes into town, snatches the record from Dennis and then leaves…kids! Kurt was flying in Australia at the time of our dinner, and had bigger fish to fry. He has since had a minor accident and did some damage to his shoulder, but he's gonna be back in the saddle, probably before this gets printed. Thanks to all who showed up, ate, drank and made the whole thing fly!

OBSERVATIONS OF A LOCAL COMP PILOT

By Tom Lanning

Typical day at Ascutney	Competition day in Florida
Agonize over the weather the previous night and immediately before you leave in the morning.	Sit back and listen to a complete weather briefing at the morning pilots meeting that includes height of cloud base, cloud coverage, wind direction, wind speed, temperature, climb rates, and much more.
Decide when and where to fly. Talk to other pilots using email, instant messenger, cell phone, 2-meter radio and at the Morningside parking lot.	Sit back and listen at the morning pilot's meeting to the scenic description of the territory you will cover that day. You get a "heads up" about swamps, prisons, sky diving operations, and other interesting sights along the way.
Rush to launch so you can get a good setup spot before the other dozen pilots show up.	You setup anywhere you like, but you have to hustle to beat the other 100 pilots looking to get the same good parking spot near launch.
Pick a time to launch so you don't get stuck behind launch potatoes.	There are no launch potatoes. The launch line is a fast moving conveyor belt. Fall asleep and you will likely awake to find yourself being yanked from the cart into the air!
Pick a time to launch so you don't have to wait for the other 5 pilots to launch.	Pick a time to launch so you don't lose an hour waiting in the launch line. Even a fast moving launch line takes time to handle 40 gliders.
A gaggle is a group of 5 or 6 gliders.	A gaggle is a group of 20 to 30 gliders. A death gaggle is a group of 50 to 70 gliders. A hairball is the point where multiple gaggles working different parts of a thermal (possibly going in different directions) start to merge.
Watch out for fledgling pilots with wheels or streamers on their king posts.	Watch out for competition pilots that didn't do well yesterday and are trying just a little too hard to make it up today.
Climb to cloud base and then head downwind.	Climb to cloud base and hang around with 50 to 100 gliders bobbing up and down for up to an hour. As the start time approaches all the pilots start watching their flight computers for the exact second when they can leave. When the clock flips you become part of an armada racing along the course line towards the first turn point.
You choose your course. You probably go downwind, where the lift looks good, and where the LZs look friendly.	You go where you are told. Sometimes that is over swamps, through blue or over-developed areas, or upwind. (You keep telling yourself it will make you a better pilot!)
Fly solo as other pilots fall behind, land, or head in different directions.	Never leave the gaggle. The gaggle will almost always fly faster than any single pilot. The gaggle finds thermal faster, centers the thermal faster and gliders faster and more efficiently.
Lead and others will follow.	Same. I lead a dozen pilots into the swamp one day during the Flytec meet when I saw some birds circling. We were about 5 minutes too early and the entire gaggle ended up on the ground.
Clouds, birds, and odor are typical thermal clues.	Gliders are typical thermal clues. You can choose between thermals based on the climb rates of other gliders. (On one first glide after a race start at the Wallaby Open, all 100 gliders were moving along the course line at the same time. The entire field was low when a single glider took a single turn in a 600 fpm thermal. You could see the other gliders turn towards that glider and start climbing just before they got sucked up into the thermal. It was the best visualization of a thermal I have yet seen.)
Drive 2 or 3 hours home. Start thinking about all the things you "should have done" and the work that awaits you tomorrow.	Crawl into your tent and wonder if your arms will continue to ache during tomorrow's flight. (We flew 7 straight days during the Flytec Championships, had 1 day off, and then flew 5 straight days at the Wallaby Open. Many of my flights were 4 to 5 hours long.)

V.H.G.A. meeting minutes

The general membership had a meeting on 4/26/03. This is a really brief summary.

Ascutney: The park opens on May 12, 2003.

The park will be closed during the car races 5/10/03 and 5/11/03.

The park will be closed during the bike races and the foot races, dates unknown.

People are needed to help at all of these races.

John Arrison has put the first aid kits in place and a work party will be arranged for later this spring. The south launch needs some maintenance.

W. Rutland: The lease purchase agreement with Jake is continuing. Rick Sharpe is currently investigating the location of the R.O.W. on Jake' s property.

Peter Kelley gave a ham to the LZ owners on behalf of the VHGA, They were very happy to receive it. A motion was made and approved to reimburse Peter for the cost of the ham.

Gary Trudeau organized a work party on 4/26/03. Participants removed fallen trees from the road and placed the first aid kit under the ramp. The road is in good shape, *but is for 4 wheel drive vehicles only.*

The membership box on launch, used primarily for transient pilots to sign waivers for Jake and the USHGA, will remain up.

Motion was made and approved to pay Jake his annual usage fee of $1,000.

Burke: The site is insured this year with no changes in the status anticipated for the toll road this year.

The club is still looking for a site director.

Pilots are not allowed to land along Kirby Ridge Road. Pilots are reminded of this and asked to respect the wishes of the landowners along the Kirby Ridge Road.

Mt. Washington: No changes.

General Discussion: The club is looking for volunteers to run the regional competitions for both hang gliders and paragliders.

All pilots must join VHGA prior to flying any VHGA insured sites.

Motion was made and approved to donate $25 to the Ascutney Fire House for allowing the club to host its meetings there.

Future meeting dates and location:

July 19th at 8:00 pm, Morningside Flight Park

October 11th at 7:00 pm, Morningside Flight Park (election of officers).

A few tiny, little words from the editor guy

Hey look some extra room! I guess I'll just take this opportunity to thank all the contributors to the newsletter. Hopefully my hack and slash editing didn't remove anything near and dear to your heart. I know there isn't any paraglider material in this edition. I tried, honestly I did. I'll pull some teeth next time, maybe that'll do the trick!

Fly safe. Rodger Furey (furrod1@attbi.com)

A Parachute Deployment in Florida!

By Tim Hoopes

It was another nice day in Florida, winds from the northeast at 15, sun and clouds. Gary Osaba had told me that the lift was forecast to be stronger than the previous day, which had been an epic Florida day with a very high cloudbase and consistent lift.

I launched at 12:45 and climbed out with the Swift-lites that had been flying in the Flytec meet and some soaring birds.

The first climb over Quest was easy, to 3700 at cloudbase. I aimed for the next cloud and went on glide, sinking to about 1200 feet before hitting a weak thermal. An Osprey and I circled for over 1/2 hour together, I have always considered osprey to be good luck. I climbed out from 1200 ft at 200 fpm, 3500 ft at 600 fpm and just before cloudbase at around 4200 the lift was a smooth and steady 1100 fpm. A street had formed and I was thinking about running the next three clouds without turning. I had my next cloud picked out and decided I would make *just one more turn.* 3/4 of the way around my last turn the wispy stuff did not appear, it just whited out entirely. I pulled in until I had a ground reference, the top of a building, and I pulled in more to max speed but the building was gone in a second. Without ground references, the glider began to make strong pitch and roll movements which continued for three or four minutes.

I tried to relax, close my eyes, focus on the feeling of gravity and imagine I was on aerotow. The glider settled. Needing a direction to steer in order to get out of the cloud, I reached for my GPS and the oscillations started again. This time I didn't get out of it - the glider looped. Without enough speed to make it all the way over, my body fell backwards and the control bar ripped out of my hands. I broke the right leading edge with my body and bent a down tube. The glider was no longer flyable and I was rotating rapidly. It was time to throw the chute. At first it didn't open, the red bag just fluttered at the end of the bridle so I gave it a good yank which did the trick. I climbed up the bridle to get higher than the glider which put me in a head up position for impact.I hit the ground in a soft cow pasture and pulled hard on the bridle while doing a landing roll I had learned in parachute class. (This was my second trip from altitude to the ground under canopy, the first one was 18 years ago and intentional.) The glider hit first, then my feet, then the rest of me, then the chute. I quickly unclipped, unzipped and wriggled out of the harness. My pulse was racing- a serious adrenaline spike. The glider looked like it was in pretty bad shape but I walked away uninjured. Marilyn had repacked that chute only 3 weeks earlier. ***NICE JOB, Marilyn!***

Lessons Learned

Tim Hoopes: What I learned from my experience

1. Don't go into the clouds.
2. The book says 500 feet - from now on 500 feet it is.
3. It can be hard to judge your distance from cloud base.
4. Sometimes there are no wispies to let you know you are close.
5. If the thermal you are in is going up at 2000 feet per minute and it takes 30 seconds to make a 360 - you will gain 1000 feet in that one 360.
   A 20 second turn will result in a 666 foot gain
   A 10 second turn willr result in a 333 foot gain.
   That estimate of how close am I to the base of the cloud becomes important under these circumstances.
6. There is no reason to be right in the center of a large cloud when you might just as well be at an edge, it is a lot easier to get away. There is not much risk of losing a thermal of that size.
7. Even a Wills Wing Talon in a dive cannot escape from some situations.
8. Fly with the best parachute you can find and keep it professionally maintained.

Mark Vaughn also had a close call with a cloud in Florida recently. "As I climbed I started to notice dark fingers forming from the bottoms of the cloud. I was still well below cloudbase and the fingers seemed to maintain their shape and density. It was about then that I noticed the air below me starting to get milky. I made one more lap abound the fingers and found myself in the preverbal soup, The cloud had engulfed me."

"In the past I felt very comfortable with just barely whiting out and going on glide. I now see just how stupid and easy that idea can turn sour. How easy it is to get rolled off course and loose all references to level flight. One second you're level and all is fine, the next you're lost and fighting for your life."

XC Tips presents

Get High and Stay High!

By Jonny Z

This article goes totally contrary to the racing mentality. It is written for the New England pilot that is just trying to reach the coast and get one of those nice green jackets!.

Often the fatal mistake that leads to the early demise of a XC flight is the flawed decision to *go*. If you're climbing at 700 fpm, within 1500 feet of cloudbase and itching to bail to the next cloud because it's nearby, think about this. You may get down range a little faster (which is important if you're trying to go really long – over 100 miles or so) but it's only going to take another two minutes to get to cloudbase and you're likely to avoid the strong sink surrounding the thermal. If the lift is 200 fpm, it's still only going to take five to seven minutes longer to get to cloudbase. Multiply that five to seven minutes by the number of thermals it takes to get to the coast, approximately ten, and we're talking about another hour or so for the entire flight to the coast, and that is with a very feeble 200 fpm climb rate. What I' m trying to say is spee means *nothing* if you're sitting on the ground looking up at a gorgeous sky. It's called *GET HIGH and STAY HIGH!* Altitude is your friend, the ground is your enemy. The coast is only 100 miles away. Try to avoid racing yourself into the ground!

Randy Adams, the New England record holder for 12 years, once told me, "you must resist the ground at all costs, just don't go down!" This would seem pretty obvious to the casual observer but you'd be amazed how many pilots will be climbing at 400-500 fpm and make one little fumble, maybe a circle that's to big. They lose the thermal and just bug out for the next one. Why?! Now they have to contend with the strong sink surrounding the thermal. Take a little time, tighten up or widen your circle or completely change direction. It's amazing how often you track wrong because of wind direction and drift and fall out the side. Don't give up on your thermal so quickly!

Personally, I don't believe in ignoring *any* lift. Often I' ll stop in the middle of glide for a tiny bump, maybe 80-100 fpm, which ends up turning into big lift and another trip to cloudbase. It always seems that when I pass up even the lightest lift, ten minutes later I'm struggling low or I'm on the ground. It could very well be that the 50 fpm that you chose to ignore was the outside edge of the last boomer that you were going to see for a while. I've had flights to the coast where I' ve circled in 50-100 fpm *sink* for almost 10 minutes just to stay alive. Do whatever it takes to survive. Remember, if there is any wind, every turn that you make will drift you closer to your goal! Be patient - at all costs, conserve altitude and don't go flying off into a blue hole just because you've topped out your thermal. If you can, just hang there in the zero sink darting out from under the cloud if you get to close, then darting back under it again. You may not set any speed records but you' ll go real far!

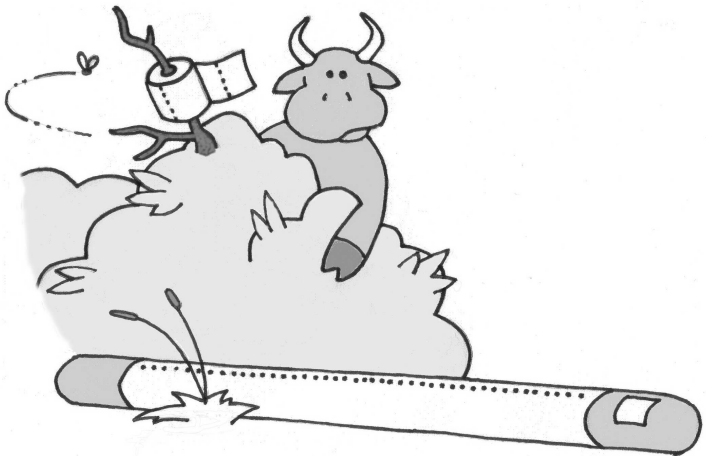
Jon Szarak has flown to the coast a total of five times, twice from Morningside.

FLORIDA cont. from page 1

Tom and the others were able to defuse the situation at their end and we soon had my glider packed up. We high tailed it outta there and arrived at Quest just in time for the Friday night barbeque.

Dan MacGonagle: By Saturday I was beginning to feeling like an amateur after failing to make it to Quest the previous two days. First I launched and sunk out like a complete cone and missed the XC train going north. I relaunched and soon found myself at 5700 over route 27. The pack had only left an hour ago so I thought I had a shot at catching up. I made a bold move toward a cloud which turned out to be further away than I though, much further. For the next hour or so I had an agonizing time scratching between 900 and 1600 over what looked like locked gate country. After Greg's ordeal the previous day I definitely wanted to land near an accessible road. Toward the end of the flight the lift got better and I started running into the boys on their way back from Quest. I soared with a bald eagle, which was cool, and landed near route 27 with Greg and Mark.

Rob Jacobs: Early in the week someone had asked me for my cell phone number. It didn't dawn on me why until my cell phone started ringing off the hook late in the afternoon of the first good soaring day. First Ken, then Peter, then Tom, then Tom again, then Ken, then someone named Don, Mike, Ken again … Apparently this person had propagated my cell number to every single living pilot from New England, which by Thursday was a considerable number. I spent a significant amount of valuable nap time arranging for everyone's pick-up via people with the appropriate vehicles, decent racks and nothing better to do. You guys owe me!



V.H.G.A. Newsletter! spring edition.